
**TRAINING
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Academic Assistance

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Purpose

The purpose of the academic assistance program is for workforce planning and development. It provides a tool for managers and employees to support academic activities that directly relate to the organization's identified knowledge, skills, and behaviors (organizational competencies), and which support the mission, vision, and values of the organization. The academic assistance program is not an employee benefit, right or entitlement; it is a management program for workforce development. Denial of participation in the academic assistance program is not grievable, except on grounds of discrimination.

Utilization of the academic assistance program shall be identified, described, and documented in the employee's development plan within his/her work plan. This provides a measurable link between the employee's increased competency and the agency's workforce planning efforts.

The academic assistance program provides reimbursement of academic costs if funds are available at the agency level, and/or time off the job if the course is available only during working hours.

Academic Assistance (continued)

Eligibility

Full-time and part-time (half time or more) permanent, probationary and time-limited employees are eligible for Academic Assistance.

Probationary and trainee employees are eligible after satisfactory performance for a period of not less than three months as determined by management.

Temporary, intermittent and part-time (less than half time) are not eligible.

Selective Service Registration

NCGS 143B-421.1 requires those eligible for selective service to be registered in order to be reimbursed academic costs. The federal Selective Service law specifies that males, both US citizens and immigrant aliens residing in the US and its territories, ages 18 through 25, shall register with the Selective Service.

Origination of Request

Requests for academic assistance may be initiated by the employee or management.

Employee initiated to:

- Maintain/enhance current skills
- Develop new skills/competencies for career development within the agency

Management initiated course to:

- Ensure employees have mandated licensure or certification
- Address a shortage of skilled workers in specific classifications
- Develop a pool of employees for succession planning
- Build specific high priority skills
- Address performance expectations of the employee as specified on the performance management improvement plan.

Academic Assistance (continued)

Agency:

The designation, "management initiated," can only be determined with the approval of the agency head (at Departmental/University level), or designee.

Job-related degrees and corresponding non-work related courses within a degree program may be approved at the discretion of management.

Academic Sources

Academic courses/degrees from accredited community colleges/colleges/universities via traditional classroom, video-based, distance learning, web-based, e-learning and certain correspondence courses (see Ineligible Sources below) are eligible for approval.

Academic courses are defined as a course/degree provided by an accredited community college/college/university. The course must provide academic credit (as opposed to CEUs), be listed in the college/university course catalog and charge tuition in the traditional meaning of tuition (as opposed to only registration fees). Accreditation must be via an accrediting agency authorized by the US Department of Education.

Ineligible Sources - Correspondence courses not accredited by the US Department of Education or the American Council on Education/CREDIT for academic credit are not eligible under this policy.

Approved Courses

Management, when making the determination whether to provide academic assistance to take a specific course, must consider the basic principle: "deemed beneficial to both the agency and the employee."

Completion of the course should have a direct benefit to the organization. The improved knowledge, skills and abilities gained by the employee should benefit the individual in completion of his/her current and/or potential job duties. Management should consider

Academic Assistance (continued)

workforce planning, succession planning and career development in approving employees to receive academic assistance.

Guidelines to consider in course selection are:

- Courses which provide knowledge and skills directly related to maintaining or improving current job skills; and also courses mandated by law or regulation as a job requirement for continued employment.
- Courses directly related to the employee's current job or a documented workforce need.

When approving courses, management must consider workforce planning in developing employees who demonstrate the ability to perform at a higher level of responsibility. Hard to recruit classifications are areas in which an employee could be approved to take courses outside his/her current classification level to meet future work needs. Examples of this are:

- technicians working on a college degree to fill professional engineering positions or
- health care workers participating in a nursing program, and
- courses included in an academic program which are necessary to complete a management approved degree program.

Academic assistance shall not be approved for courses where management has determined that neither the course nor degree is of benefit to the agency.

The agency head or designee may approve exceptions to the approved course policy.

Audited Courses - Academic courses which are audited are eligible for academic assistance; however an employee may be reimbursed for the same course or course equivalent only once. Reimbursement requires a statement written on school letterhead and signed by the instructor that the employee attended at least 85% of the scheduled class meetings during the academic term.

Academic Assistance (continued)

Certification/Licensing (Post-Employment)

Incumbent employees who meet minimum educational requirements for employment and for whom certification/licensing is required after employment or is deemed desirable by management and approved by the agency head or designee are eligible for academic assistance under the following conditions:

- Certification/licensing is mandated or
- Certification/licensing is a policy requirement of the employing agency.

Academic assistance is authorized for certification or licensing only if the certification or license is attained via academic course work.

Leave

An approved course should be taken on the employee's own time. If a course can be taken only during working hours, eligible employees must request academic leave prior to the beginning of the course allowing sufficient time for the academic assistance request to be reviewed. Academic leave may be granted unless the supervisor identifies work conditions that will not permit the employee to be absent from the job. Supervisors are encouraged to develop alternate work arrangements to complete the work assignments and also grant academic leave. Reasonable travel time as determined by the supervisor may be permitted to attend approved courses.

Management may approve academic leave, and, if approved, academic leave shall not be charged to the employee's vacation leave.

Academic leave during work hours shall not exceed one course up to five hours academic credit per academic term. Exceptions to the leave restriction may be addressed using the Academic Leave with Pay provisions of this policy.

Academic Assistance (continued)

Reimbursement

Academic Costs - Eligible employees approved for academic assistance may be reimbursed academic costs charged by the academic source at which the employee is enrolled. Academic costs are defined as charges assessed by an academic source to every person enrolling for the course. These charges are required of everyone and are neither negotiable nor discretionary for the individual enrolling in the course. Academic costs include in-state tuition, fees and course/lab fees. Course/lab fees must always be itemized. Reimbursement of course/lab fees may require a written statement from the academic source justifying the fee as a required fee in addition to other fees.

Amount of Reimbursement - Eligible employees may be reimbursed academic costs charged by the academic source where enrolled. Agencies/universities may reimburse all academic costs as specified in the paragraph "Academic Costs," or reimburse only tuition and other academic-related fees, but not fees unrelated to registering for a course or a degree program, such as dorm, student union construction, athletic fees, student health service, cultural event fees, etc.

Agencies may also, with a bona fide business justification, reduce the amount of reimbursement per employee to a set amount less than the tuition and fees and/or limit the number of courses for which any one employee may be reimbursed in an academic term.

Agencies/universities choosing to reimburse an amount less than the academic costs specified in the paragraph "Academic Costs" shall make this information available to all employees at the beginning of the fiscal year and apply this limitation in a fair and equitable manner to all employees requesting academic assistance in that fiscal year.

Source	Amount
University of North Carolina Institutions and Institutions of the North Carolina Community College-System	100% of academic costs for up to 20 credit hours per fiscal year.

Academic Assistance (continued)

All academic institutions other than institutions of The University of North Carolina and institutions of the NC Community College System	Up to the maximum academic cost charged by the UNC institutions for up to 20 credit hours or 32 quarter hours per fiscal year. This amount will be determined by OSP and published within 10 working days of the adjournment of the General Assembly and the meeting of the UNC Board of Governors to approve fees. Reimbursement of tuition and fees from out-of-state colleges/universities shall not exceed the amount as specified above.
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Special Graduate Programs - Graduate professional programs (medicine, veterinary medicine, business, etc.) with unusual course/lab fees, tuition or other fees will be considered on a course by course basis. The agency head or his/her designee may approve payment of these academic costs.

Non-reimbursable Expenses - Reimbursement shall **not** be made for:

- Charges specifically related to processing or receiving continuing education units (CEUs)
- Application, examination, and graduation fees
- Transportation costs
- Textbooks and supplies

Other Financial Assistance - Financial assistance from any other financial aid program shall not be duplicated under this program. However, the difference, if any, between such aid and the allowable costs under the Academic Assistance program may be reimbursed.

Free Tuition - When employees of an educational institution or any other State agency are granted free tuition and non-negotiable fees, the value of this tuition and non-negotiable fees must be considered as part of the allowable academic costs.

Academic Assistance (continued)

Advisory Note: Tuition waiver programs at institutions of The University of North Carolina are authorized by both state law (NCGS 116-143) and governed by IRS regulation (US Code Title 26, IRS Section 117 (d)(2)). The state academic assistance policy is not applicable to tuition waiver programs.

Tax Status - Congress enacted the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 which allows an employer to offer its employees up to \$5,250 in tax-free (job related and non job-related) educational assistance for undergraduate and graduate level courses begun after December 31, 2001.

Advisory Note: The exemption expires 12/31/2011, unless extended by Congress.

Requirement for Reimbursement - Management may consider any current disciplinary action for job performance or personal conduct prior to approval of the application for reimbursement.

If funds are available, the applicant shall receive reimbursement of approved academic costs upon submitting evidence of satisfactory completion of a preapproved course. Completion is defined as "Satisfactory," "Pass," or a grade of "C" or better for undergraduate courses, and a "B" or better for graduate courses. **An "Incomplete" shall not be reimbursed until a final grade is issued.**

Requests for reimbursement should be submitted within 30 days of completion of the course or receipt of grade.

Employee Transfers and Separations - If an employee transfers to another State agency, and subsequently completes an approved course, the employee should submit a request for reimbursement to the employing agency. The employing agency is responsible for processing the request per the provisions of this policy, and providing reimbursement if funds are available.

Academic Assistance (continued)

Employees who separate from State service, except by reduction in force are not eligible for reimbursement.

Thesis/Dissertation Research Courses

Job-related thesis/dissertation research courses at the masters/doctoral level are restricted as follows:

- All required written examinations for the degree shall be successfully completed before the course is approved.
 - A maximum of 15 hours leave may be approved for each academic credit hour. All leave hours shall be used during the academic term and may not be accumulated.
 - A maximum total of 9 academic credit hours are allowed for any one employee.
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Courses Taken at Agency Request

Because of specific high priority skill needs of the agency, employees may be requested by management to take specific courses or degree programs. Under these circumstances, the following applies:

- All limitations under the provisions of this policy are waived. Employees are still responsible for requirements for withholding taxes and FICA.
- All expenses to the individual should be reimbursed related to acquiring the necessary course or degree, to include: travel costs; examinations and administrative fees; textbooks and other course materials. (Any books or materials paid for by the agency become the property of the agency.)

If courses taken at agency request exceed the credit hour per fiscal year limitations of the academic assistance program, then the situation shall be administered under the policy provisions for Extended Academic Leave.

The designation, "At Agency Request," can only be determined with the approval of the agency head (at Departmental/University level), or his/her designee.

Academic Assistance (continued)

Courses specified as part of an employee's improvement/development plan are not considered to be at agency request unless approved by the department head or designee.

Extended Leave Situations

Courses taken at agency request that exceed the credit hour per fiscal year limitation must follow the Extended Academic Leave policy. An agency wishing to initiate a program for a number of employees to participate in a degree or certificate program must also refer to the Extended Academic Leave policy.

Extended Academic Leave - The State may provide leave with pay or leave without pay for certain types of academic courses. The references to these specific policies are set out below.

Academic Leave Without Pay - Extended academic leave without pay may be granted in accordance with the normal leave policy as outlined in the Leave without Pay Policy of the State Personnel Commission.

Academic Leave With Pay - Office of State Personnel approval is required unless included in the agency's delegation agreement. Individual agency policies and procedures shall be submitted to the Office of State Personnel for review and approval prior to implementation or upon subsequent updates and revisions.

State agencies may consider any employee (permanent, probationary, trainee or time-limited) for extended academic leave to participate in job or career-related work-study, scholarship or fellowship programs based upon the following criteria:

- Verification that both labor market and organizational needs exist for development in the program requested.
- Equal opportunity provided in selection of candidates.
- Employees are informed of agency policies and procedures regarding:
 - ✓ Announcement and application procedures,

Academic Assistance (continued)

- ✓ Screening and selection of employees,
- ✓ Limitations and restrictions on academic courses,
- ✓ Leave, salary, benefit conditions, withholding taxes and FICA, and
- ✓ Reimbursement agreement.

Requests for extended academic leave initiated by the employee and which do not meet with the above criteria will be administered according to the State Personnel policy on leave without pay.

Administration Responsibility

The Office of State Personnel is responsible for the interpretation of this policy; and approval of agency policy and procedures, and all subsequent agency revisions. Each State agency is delegated responsibility for, and authority to administer the program within the provisions of this policy in a fair, consistent and equitable manner.

The agency should designate an agency coordinator to assist with the delegation and consistent implementation of this policy throughout the agency. This delegation is contingent on the prior submission of a written policy, outlining procedures to implement the program, and the written approval of the Office of State Personnel.

Changes to the agency policy or procedures also require prior written approval of the Office of State Personnel.

State Equal Employment Opportunity policies and procedures are applicable.

Procedures

To receive academic assistance, an employee shall:

- Complete the application (PD-136 or agency equivalent) and forward it to the immediate supervisor
- Submit the form prior to enrollment or in accordance with agency schedules to allow time for review, approval and notification to the employee. Agency heads,

Academic Assistance (continued)

or a designee, may approve an application received after class begins if circumstances warrant.

The application must include:

- The course title(s), institution and location, class schedule, and whether the course is for academic credit, audit or certification/licensing.
- A description of the course(s) and how the course(s) meets the criteria under the approved courses section of this policy.
- The amount of academic cost reimbursement, specifying tuition and/or fees, and any course/lab fees requested.
- A specification of requested time off from work for academic leave including travel time.
- If time off from work is requested, a statement demonstrating unavailability of the course except during work hours.

Approval of Application

Employees applying for academic assistance must receive a written response from management regarding approval/disapproval of academic assistance requests, which notes any changes in the application or conditions of approval. The response must also indicate whether reimbursement for the course is subject to withholding taxes or budgetary restraints. Management may consider overall job performance or any current disciplinary action prior to approval of the application.

Maintaining Records

Each agency is responsible for retaining records, on a fiscal year basis, of academic assistance activity. This information shall be reported annually to the Office of State Personnel upon request and shall include the following:

- Number employees participating in the program,
- Amount (tuition and fees) reimbursed,
- Number employees granted educational leave,
- Number employees taking courses at agency's request,

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- Number employees granted extended education leave,
 - Number of employees taking courses for mandated/required certification/licensing
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Mentoring Program

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Program Administration

It is the policy of the State of North Carolina to offer mentorship programs to all state employees through an agency-governed mentoring program. Each state agency may elect to establish a mentoring program. The mentoring program shall consist of a joint effort of the North Carolina Office of State Personnel and any branch of state government. Administration of the statewide program shall be based in the Office of State Personnel, with each agency being responsible for the establishment and management of a mentoring program to meet its organizational needs.

Agencies are encouraged to create mentoring programs by utilizing The Mentoring Program Model, Revised Edition; December 2004, developed by the Office of State Personnel as a guide to be modified based upon its needs. The Office of State Personnel will provide consultation and technical assistance to agencies wishing to develop and implement a mentoring program. Agencies will submit a copy of their mentoring program to the Office of State Personnel and any updates as they occur. The status of an agency's mentoring program will be tracked and reported annually by the Office of State Personnel.

Purpose

The purpose of this program is to enhance an employee's career development by implementing a mentoring program that will partner the employee with an experienced employee who will coach, teach, and guide the employee's career path. The mentoring program will meet the needs of the agency, which include but are not limited to recruitment, retention, training, and improvement in the work environment.

Mentoring Program (continued)

An employee's participation in the mentoring program does not guarantee promotion nor entitle the employee to preferential treatment in employment issues.

Definitions

Mentoring - A professional relationship in which a person with greater experience, expertise, and knowledge coaches, teaches, guides, and helps another person to develop professionally.

Mentor - A person, who coaches, teaches, guides, and helps in another person's career development.

Protégé - A person, who receives coaching, teaching, and guidance from a mentor in his/her career development.

Program Curriculum

Agencies are encouraged to provide a specific number of hours per year for individual mentoring sessions between the mentor and protégé in accordance with their mentoring program guidelines. In addition to the guidance and assistance the protégé will gain from the mentor, agencies may plan group activities for its participants. These activities can be conducted on a monthly basis such as monthly forums and on an annual basis for agencies with statewide employee population. The activities should be tailored around professional development initiatives. The agencies may consult with the Office of State Personnel on topics and presenters for the monthly forums.

Participation

The selection process will be developed by the agency utilizing fair, consistent, and equitable criteria. The agency will document its selection criteria and process. Each agency's mentoring program must be open to all of its employees; however, limitations may be instituted based on various criteria such as mentor/protégé ratios, geographical constraints, and other items of concern for the agency's administrative personnel.

Mentoring Program (continued)

Participation in the mentoring program is completely voluntary. The duration of a participant's involvement in the mentoring program is dependent upon the guidelines stipulated by the governing agency; however, at least one year is encouraged.

The Office of State Personnel does not condone any discrimination in terms of membership or treatment because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, and disability.

Completion of Program

Each agency is encouraged to recognize in some form the mentors and protégés participating upon completion of the program. Additionally, the agency shall inform the Office of State Personnel of its participants so that the Office of State Personnel may recognize the employees and the agency in its recognition program.

Funding for the Program

Each agency is to ensure that sufficient resources are utilized to allow the program to succeed.

Based upon availability of funds, agencies may consider an In-Range Adjustment due to job changes for employees serving as mentors in accordance with the agency's mentoring program guidelines.

Advisory Note: The Mentoring Program Model, Revised Edition, December 2004 produced by the Office of State Personnel is included in the EEO **Planning** and Resources Guide and provides details on how to design a mentoring program.

Personnel Training and Development

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Policy

It is the policy of the State of North Carolina to provide training and development for its employees designed to:

- Improve productivity, effectiveness and efficiency of government service by development and better utilization of talents, abilities and potential of employees.
 - Help employees develop their knowledge, skills and abilities so that they might become better qualified to perform the duties of their present jobs and advance to more responsible positions.
 - Provide for the development of managers and supervisors capable of organizing and developing effective management systems for the accomplishment of each State agency's goals and objectives.
 - Accelerate the development of culturally disadvantaged employees whose abilities and aptitudes are underutilized because of inadequate education and training.
 - Alleviate labor market shortages and reduce personnel turnover.
 - Prepare employees to deal more effectively with growing social, scientific and economic problems faced by government by making use of advances in professional and vocational knowledge and technology.
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Responsibilities

Providing adequate training and development of State employees can best be accomplished through the combined efforts of employees, supervisors on the job, departmental management and the Office of State Personnel in cooperation with the State's institutions of higher education.

Personnel Training and Development (continued)

Training and development programs should recognize the following roles:

Employees. State employees at all levels ultimately retain an obligation for their own development and education and it is expected that employees will advance their own careers through appropriate self-education and self-improvement.

Managers and Supervisors. Managers and supervisors have the initial responsibility for training and development of their employees. In fulfilling this responsibility, managers and supervisors should identify the individual training needs of their employees, and work with employees to prepare and effect plans for their development. Such plans should make use of on-the-job training including individual and group instruction by supervisors, formal training and educational activities, and rotational assignments to provide greater depth and a wide base of experience.

Agencies. Each agency has a responsibility for training and developing its employees. It is responsible for assuring that training programs geared to specific agency needs are planned, budgeted and established and that their employees participate in these programs. In addition each agency shall work closely with other agencies and the Office of State Personnel to promote the use of interagency training programs and resources wherever possible.

Office of State Personnel. The Office of State Personnel shall be responsible for the State's role in overall planning, coordinating and review of training and development programs and appropriate interagency training.

State Universities, the Community College System and Public Instruction. The Office of State Personnel and State agencies are responsible for utilizing the State's universities, community college system, and public instruction to the fullest degree possible in securing professional, management and vocational education to meet their personnel development needs.

Personnel Training and Development (continued)

Use of Non-State Government Education and Training Sources Policy

State agencies may enter into contracts for education and training through non-State government sources in accordance with established State Personnel Commission policies and procedures. All contracts should follow policies and procedures issued by the Division of Purchase and Contract, Department of Administration.

Determination of Need for Training

Before State Personnel authorizes education or training through non-State government sources, the agency must have:

- Determined that agency employees do not possess the knowledge and skills to meet that training or educational need, and
 - Determined that training is not available within State government to meet the agency's needs. Education and training are not available when:
 - ✓ Existing programs in State government will not meet the need
 - ✓ New programs cannot be established to meet need
 - ✓ Inquiry has failed to disclose availability of programs in other departments, State Personnel, public education, higher education institutions or elsewhere in State government.
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Selection of Non-State Government Sources

When there is a choice between outside training sources, consideration will be given to the following factors:

- Competency to provide the particular training needed
- Geographic accessibility of the training source
- Availability of training at the particular time or place it is needed
- Comparative cost as determined by Division of Purchase and Contract policies and procedures
- Practicality of administrative arrangement involved
- The significance of accreditation

Personnel Training and Development (continued)

- The advantages that might result from arrangements with the source when several equally acceptable are available
 - The consequences of using limited State resources versus none at all
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Procedure for Approval of Non-State Sources

Should any State agency have an educational or training need that cannot be met by resources within State government, the following steps must be followed:

1. The agency's training needs and training objectives must be defined. This should include an explanation of how the achievement of these training objectives contributes to the agency's goals.
 2. Upon agreement by the Office of State Personnel that such training cannot be obtained within State government resources, the Division of Purchase and Contract should be notified of the training need through the submission of a justification memo 1 North Carolina Administrative Code 5C. This request should be coordinated through the agency's purchasing officer.
 3. It must be documented in the justification memo that the educational or training need cannot reasonably be met by any State government institution or agency. This should include a list of the agencies contacted and the responses of each agency.
 4. The required training will then be acquired in accordance with State Purchase and Contract Policy.
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Apprenticeship Training

It is policy of the State of North Carolina to promote and encourage the establishment, maintenance and growth of apprenticeship programs to help meet the workforce needs of State government. All such program shall be administered through and in accordance with policy and standards established by the North Carolina Department of Labor in cooperation with the employing agency. All persons serving in an apprenticeship program supported by funding from a permanent position subject to the State Personnel Act shall receive a regular trainee appointment. An apprenticeship trainee appointment to a permanent position may be preceded by a time-limited appointment to an

Personnel Training and Development (continued)

apprenticeship slot. An apprentice with a trainee or time-limited appointment shall receive the same employment benefits as other SPA employees with trainee or time-limited appointments. Upon successful completion of an apprenticeship program, an apprentice who enters regular state employment shall receive a permanent appointment.

Public Manager Program

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Program Administration

It is the policy of the State of North Carolina to provide competency-based training for mid-level managers through the Public Manager Program (PMP). The PMP is a joint effort of North Carolina State government and the University System of North Carolina. The program shall be based in and administered by the Office of State Personnel.

Purpose

The program is a developmental training program intended for middle managers employed by the various state agencies and universities. Other public managers may attend courses on an availability basis. The program seeks to increase general managerial competence and ability.

Certification/Accreditation

The PMP is accredited by the National Certified Public Manager Consortium and shall be in full compliance with the program accreditation standards of the Consortium. This allows the program to award successful participants the designation "Certified Public Manager". Records of each participant's program accomplishments and administrative data will be maintained by the program. Record of program participation becomes part of the employee's personnel file.

Program Curriculum

The program consists of the series of courses, and assignments associated with these courses. The program requires course attendance and demonstrated ability to apply

Public Manager Program (continued)

learnings. Agencies are responsible to insure the participant's availability for all activities associated with the program.

Enrollment

The program establishes prerequisites and selection guidelines. To allow agencies an opportunity to participate on an equitable basis, the program director shall allocate a maximum number of enrollments to each agency based on a consideration of such factors as: percentage of total employment; percentage of managers to total employees; adjustments to ensure that smaller agencies are represented; and adjustment caused by cancellations. Agency management is responsible for selection and recommendation of applicants for the program. Final approval of participants rests with the Office of State Personnel, based on a determination that the employee had sufficient training to benefit from the program and serves in a mid-level or program manager role.

Certification of Completion

A certificate of completion will be awarded to participants of the Public Manager Program upon completion of established requirements. Record of program participation shall become part of the employee's personnel file.

Funding for the Program

Unless fully funded by the General Assembly, funds for the operation of the PMP shall be derived from fees charged to agencies for approved participants. Fees shall be based on actual costs of development, instruction, materials and administration.
